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AUTHOR Frelow, Robert D.
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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a view of the minority administrator's role in desegregated school systems over the past twenty years. It presents a prototypical example of how basically egalitarian principles associated with school desegregation have been misrepresented in practice. A challenge to the system is proposed using coalitions and political power as the primary means of effecting change. (Author)

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# THE RACIAL INTEGRATION MODEL

# AND

# MINORITY ADMINISTRATORS

by

Robert D. Frelow, Ph.D.

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# THE RACIAL INTEGRATION MODEL AND MINORITY ADMINISTRATORS

When the people of the Earth all know beauty
as beauty
There arises the recognition of ugliness
When the people of the Earth all know good
as good
There arises the recognition of evil.

Laotse

There is perhaps no better time than now, almost twenty years after Brown vs. Board of Education, to study desegregation in the public schools. The minority administrator's role is particularly important since it provides a prototypical example of how the basically egalitarian principles associated with desegregation have been implemented over the years.

Contradictions in philosophy are evident from the beginning. Minority administrators of newly desegregated schools in the South were early victims of desegregation. Black principals and teachers were the first to be dismissed as black schools closed and black children were absorbed into white schools. Later, we witnessed both North and South, as school desegregation activity enveloped the Border States and the Southwest, the emergence of jobs specially devised for minority educators - jobs conceived in equal educational opportunity and dedicated to the proposition of controlling black students. Black professionals suddenly discovered that regardless of irrefutable qualification, the most they could hope for were positions dedicated to the proposition of"keeping the natives quiet", or at least pacified.

Integration - For Better and For Worse

Progress, however, does not always occur in linear directions; lessons are sometimes learned from seemingly conflicting events. School desegregation it must be remembered, received its impetus from both negative and positive forces. The desire for integrated schools often emanated from a firm rejection of all-black schools. School desegregation plans are commonly devised around the given principle that only black schools should be closed and only black children should be bused. A review of desegregation activity in recent years illustrates the point.

A few cities sought solutions to segregation through "open enrollment" plans, wherein minority students who normally attended ghetto schools attended predominantly Caucasian schools in another part of the city. Baltimore experimented with open enrollment, but it became increasingly apparent that many minority group parents resented the one-way ride and the accompanying implication that all of the advantages of desegregation were for the racial minority.

Redistricting was tried in random communities around the nation. Reportedly segregated schools (one Caucasion, the other minority) were paired for particular purposes, e.g., sharing such activities as play days, science, camping trips, assembly programs, joint P.T.A. or faculty meetings in the interest of integrated experiences. Reliance on these programs, however, proponents of desegration argued, conceded to the problem it purported to alleviate. At best, such action was viewed by some as better than no action - by others, at its worst, patronizing and insulting.

The Princeton plan is the most famous of desegregation mechanisms. The plan combines contiguous attendance areas serving separate races into single attendance areas. In the small community of Princeton, where only a few schools were involved, the total system was desegregated. In larger cities the plan had little effectiveness, for segregated black and white schools are usually far

apart and separated by a "buffer area" of relatively integrated schools. Modifications of the Princeton plan, however, have been effective in desegregating schools in several eastern and far western communities.[1]

In Teaneck, New Jersey, desegregation was achieved by converting a predominantly black school into a school serving a single grade. The black students who formerly would have attended this neighborhood school were divided among the remaining schools in the community. The Teaneck Superintendent of Schools and the Board of Education were reportedly subjected to strong threats of physical violence accompanied by open anti-black and anti-semitic feeling.

Englewood, New Jersey's modification was inaugurated under extreme pressure from the black community and at the mandate of the State Commissioner of Education. Englewood closed its predominantly black school and made it an administration building.

Riverside, California, desegregated under the impetus of protest and sit-in and a fire which partially destroyed one of its segregated black elementary schools. Desegregation was effected by closing the black school and busing the children to the remaining elementary schools.

Berkeley, California, and Greenburgh, New York, are among the few districts that have initiated desegregation plans requiring busing of both black and white children.[2] Berkeley, a medium-sized city of approximately 120,000, completed the total desegregation of its schools by busing black children into predominantly white primary schools and white children into predominantly black intermediate schools. Greenburgh, located 25 miles north of New York City, initiated a "Princeton plan" and a two-way busing program in 1951 to maximize use of building facilities in the black community. In 1968, Greenburgh was successfully merged, by state mandate, with an adjoining all-white district. Two-way busing and the Princeton plan organization were maintained.

These descriptions of desegregation activity are not presented as examples of inherently destructive activity, nor are they presented as pure examples of demeaning endeavors. They are used rather to illustrate the vulnerability of desegregation activity to racism. Desegregation persists, however, as the primary rebuttal to racial segregation. It provides the formal arena for systematic challenges to racism in the institutions of the society. The plight of the black administrator in the desegregated school should not be viewed as an indictment of desegregation. It should be recognized as one of the few opportunities where the hypocrisies of a nation can be formally confronted.

The Crises Stopper

The black administrator, too, must confront his own attitudes and perceptions that define and delimit his professional expertise. A young black school executive tells of his appointment to the position of special assistant to the superintendent in a newly desegregated school. He cites as his early objective getting to know personnel, some major aspects of the district's program, the students and some of their learning problems. His orientation centered around issues of instruction and learning, and how one of the major problems in education was the absence of systematic means of assessing educational programs. He later recalls the day that set the tone for his future in the district as follows: His secretary had excitedly entered his office with an urgent request from the superintendent that he meet in the conference room. She added somewhat urgently that the high school principal had just entered the building and had been hastily ushered into the conference room. Apprehensively, he assembled his note pad and rushed accross the office lobby into the conference room. As he entered, the Superintendent, the Principal of the high school, the Director of Secondary Education, the Dean of Students, and other members of the superintendent's Administrative Council sat hunched in tense antici-

pation. The superintendent turned abruptly and offered him the seat usually filled by the Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, who now sat inconspicuously near the back of the room. The high school principal thrust a paper into his hand and he was testily asked to read its contents. It turned out to be a list of demands from the Black Students Union. The demands read as follows:

"Right the present evils of today immediately. Too much time has been wasted already. We will not wait another 400 years. Implement our demands now!

1. A Black Curriculum Committee consisting of four black students and three black teachers.

2. Student initiated courses. For every 30 students who sign an enrollment petition a course should be taught.

3. A Black Curriculum Coordinator responsible to the Black Curriculum Committee, who will also act as a personnel recruiter for black teachers of black courses.

4. The offering of the following courses as a part of the Black Curriculum:

   a. Black American Literature and Poetry
   b. History of African Art, Literature, Culture and Politics
   c. Black Journalism
   d. Black - Socio-Economics
   e. Modern African Languages: Swahili and Igbo

5. The Black Curriculum Coordinator to be given the authority to stock the school library with black literature as chosen by the black students.

6. An in-service training program in Black American History and Culture for all teachers.

7. Five Black Counselors and we want them in two to four weeks.

8. Two Black Cooks and Soul Food cooked three times a week in the school cafeteria.

9. African and Soul Food must be included in the Food Classes.

10. African dances must be included in the physical education curriculum.

11. The Tracking System of the high school must be eliminated.

12. All racist teachers and administrators must be removed from our school.

13. More black teachers and administrators.

14. Removal of law-enforcement officers from the campus. (This means the special officers.)

POWER TO THE STUDENTS! BLACK POWER TO BLACK STUDENTS!"

He suddenly became aware of a sea of white faces looking urgently toward him for some kind of response. Some wore expressions of anger and bewilderment, but all seemed to be searching for a hopeful gesture or expression of solution. He could offer them little consolation. He suppressed an inclination to express agreement with the suppositions of the articles. He had experienced desegregation in the South and the resultant loss of jobs for black counselors, teachers and principals to whites. If the article were true, he could not honestly rebut it. He sensed, however, that the tension of the meeting was not centered around the proportions of black staff in the district, but the threats of black student violence implicit in the article. What he had speculated was soon formalized by the superintendent. He was assigned to meet with the Black Student Union and discuss their grievances. He was a logical choice because his presence in the meetings was viewed as an obvious rebuttal to the article's allegations. He accepted the assignment with some anxiety. He felt used, but allowed himself to be deluded by the flattery of their attention and the giddy effect of involvement in high-level decision makeing.

The students, fortunately, were more perceptive and literally threw him out of the first meeting. The refused to meet with "Mr. Charlie's nigger" and insisted on a meeting with the "man". The details of subsequent meetings between the superintendent and the Black Student Union were never revealed to him but apparently his creditibility was somehow repealed. He was again asked by the

superintendent to work with the leaders of the group. In the interim, he had done his homework. He discovered that there was only one black counselor in a high school of 3,000 students, of which 40% were black. Seventeen percent of the district's teaching staff was black, a favorable figure when compared to the state as a whole. However, less that 5% of the total were at the high school. There were two black administrators in the district, but none were assigned to the high school. There were elective courses in the high school centered around South American, European and Asian studies, but none around African Studies. The district had entered into an inordinate logistical arrangement to integrate students, but had neglected efforts to "integrate" its staff. It had diversified its curriculum offerings but had omitted an area of study reflecting the heritage of 40 percent of its student body.

On the other hand, he discovered that the Board of Education had established a policy some years previously that the goal / of the district was to have a staff and develop an educational program consistent with the pluralistic heritage of the country and the diversity of the community. In effect, what the Black Student Union was asking of the administration was an implementation of policy. He used that fact to help the Black Student Union direct its demands into a format that the Board of Education and administration could not legitimately rebut.

The students initially were wary of him. Sensitive to their distrust, he made no efforts to alter their attitudes and conclusions. He developed his role with them by providing information, data and resource references. He wanted them to realize that their rhetoric had been an effective beginning, but sustained communication required study and supportive data. He attempted to prepare them for the legal and bureaucratic rebuttals that they would encounter once their demands were under consideration. They cooperatively researched colleges, universities,

placement offices, and school systems for black counselors, teachers, and administrators. They conducted interviews with prospective candidates. Blackness, they found was an important but not an exclusive prerequisite for the kind of human being needed in schools.

The leaders of the Black Student Union realized that the measure of their leadership with their constituents was the deliverance of results, and that his knowledge of the system helped with that objective; on the other hand, he knew that their trust in the system depended upon a sincere response to their demands.

Their preparation was rewarded at subsequent meetings with the board and administration. They effectively rebutted cliche statements about the availability of qualified black staff with lists of prospective candidates. Less than a month after the presentation of their demands, recommendations regarding each were presented to the board. Of the fourteen items, two were dropped by the Black Student Union (items 12 and 14). The twelve remaining were approved and acted upon.

His handling of the crisis was praised by board and superintendent. Initially, he, too, shared their elation. After a series of new crises in which he was abruptly thrust into mediation roles between black students and school officials, it becaue apparent that his role had become defined in specific terms. He was not an educator, nor a policy maker, nor an executive. He had become the "fireman" for the district. He had become the crisis stopper.

It should not be concluded from the above that the "fireman" is in all cases a despised position. The minority administrator has not resisted this role. He is proud of his "expertise" and never misses an opportunity to give advice to his white counterparts. He should be aware, however, that his "expertise" has temporary validity, particularly among those individuals <u>most</u> enthusiastic in

their support of integration. He is temporarily needed for his "expertise", but at the same time despised because of the fear that he may be correct in his assumptions about the uniqueness of the black experience, i.e., that no white person (not even a liberal) could ever fully comprehend it. He should know that the "minority expert" is completely antithetical to liberal notions of racial integration. He should realize also that he has provided a rationale for his exclusion from decisions that effect the total system. He has, in effect, defined a peripheral involvement for himself.

What are his alternatives? Despite equal opportunity programs, close examiniation of the kinds of responsibilities blacks are assuming reveal that only in a few instances have school districts chosen to employ blacks in decision-making, policy influencing positions.[3] Ed Fort, one of the few black superintendents in the country, echoes the sentiments of many black administrators:[4]

> "School Boards and administrators responsible for hiring continually seek to involve blacks and other minority group educators in decision-making, as consultants, lower echelon administrators or as principals. But so far, the vast majority of boards, when confronted with the choice of hiring a black or white superintendent -- all other factors being equal -- have ruled in favor of the latter."

In racially integrated schools particularly, boards have demonstrated a reluctance to hire as top man a black man. These boards are acutely sensitive to notions of racial balance. Maintaining racial balance generally refers to avoiding "tipping the scale" towards a higher percentage of black children. Hiring a black superintendent is viewed as a psychological acknowledgment that the district is "going black".

One might, on a scale of values, rank the "fireman" role above no role. The issue here, however, is not the black executive's actions, but his options.

The racial integration model to date has provided neither the process nor a format for expanding those options. The minority administrator, consequently, can not depend upon integration ideals or principles to provide the climate for fundamental changes in executive deployment. "Change Methodology" is basically technical and pragmatic. It acknowledges the reality of both power and influence. It recognizes the validity of both coercion and persuasion. Stated plainly, the best advice to minority executives may seem as cynical as that of Machiavelli to his prince: Know the true nature and structure of power in your community. Technical assistance is available in various parts of the country. Use that knowledge to determine what are the commonalities among and between power sources and where are the potential coalitions and support systems. Become familiar with the growing number of professional organizations concerned with equal rights for minority professionals. Enlist their support in implementing action programs in your community. Such activities may do little to alter current patterns of executive deployment; there is, on the other hand, hope of victory when opponents are challenged on common grounds with comparable weapons.

[1] Much of this section is based on information gleaned from a survey of integration activity conducted by Niel V. Sullivan, et.al., Integration of the Berkeley Elementary Schools: A Report to the Superintendent, Office of Research & Publications, BUSD, September 1967

[2] Robert D. Frelow, The Berkeley Plan for Desegregation, Office of Research & Publications, BUSD, 1969; also Robert D. Frelow, Compensatory Education and School Desegregation, A Comparative Study of Resource Allocation, unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1970, pp. 43-55

[3] Based on report presented by National Association of Black Adult Educators (NABAE) at the Joint Conference of AEA/USA and NAPCAE, Los Angeles, California, November 5, 1971.

[4] Edward B. Fort, "A Black Superintendent Talks About Being a Black Superintendent," School Management, May 1969.